

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: July 9, 2015

Agenda Item: Tendoy Bighorn Sheep Licenses (HD315)

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 minutes

Background

FWP is asking the Commission to approve the issuing of over-the-counter either-sex bighorn sheep licenses for hunting district 315, the Tendoy Mountains, to begin the depopulation phase of the depopulation/restocking project in the fall of 2015. Clarifications or adjustments from the June adoption are highlighted.

Licenses would be available for purchase **during all or a portion of August** at standard prices of \$125 for residents and \$750 for non-residents. FWP proposes a hunt format similar to the unlimited bighorn areas except no harvest quota would control the length of hunt and licenses would be valid for either-sex bighorn. Season dates would follow the general season format with an archery-only season from the first Saturday in September through Sept. 14 and a general season opening Sept. 15 and running through the Sunday following Thanksgiving. Mandatory reporting of all harvest through established FWP reporting numbers will be necessary to track harvest. **Biological samples may be collected from harvested sheep. In a final review of statute, successful hunters harvesting any ram or lamb would be subject to a 7-year wait before applying for a bighorn license. Hunters that have harvested a ram in previous six years could not take a ram or lamb in this hunt.** All harvested rams of ½- curl or greater would have to be “plugged” with an identifying aluminum plug that goes in one of the horns.

An aggressive harvest strategy is needed. It may take at least two years to remove the estimated 30-40 bighorns in the area. Any sheep remaining after hunting would be removed by FWP by whatever means necessary, to include aerial gunning, and the meat donated to a local food bank.

Following confirmation that the bighorns are gone from the project area, the area will be restocked with approximately 50 healthy bighorns from one or more of Montana’s source populations into one or more release sites previously accessed by FWP.

Public Involvement Process & Results

Formal public comment ended July 2. Comments were forwarded to the Commission. A growing public interest in this potential opportunity prompts questions about how short or long any sale period might be to manage hunter numbers.

Alternatives and Analysis

A thorough analysis of the depopulation/restocking project was done in the EA and Decision Notice. Specific to alternatives and analysis for this proposal for licenses, if licenses are not issued the depopulation phase of the project could not be done as proposed.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends that the Commission approve the proposed issuing of over-the-counter either-sex bighorn sheep licenses for HD 315, the Tendoy Mountains.

Proposed Motion

I move that the Commission approve proposed issuing of over-the-counter either-sex bighorn sheep licenses for HD 315, the Tendoy Mountains.